

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Raids were carried out this week against both the Al Furqan Islamic Information Centre (Al Furqan IIC), as well as a number of Muslim households within the vicinity. Much speculation and accusation has accompanied these raids, most of which is unfounded and hurtful. The members of Al Furqan Islamic Centre are therefore issuing this press release in order to clarify certain matters, and to set the record straight.

Twelve properties in total were raided, most of which were located in the South and South-East of Melbourne. We wish to bring attention firstly to the heavy-handedness and unnecessarily violent manner in which these raids were carried out. An unnecessarily large police force – many of them very heavily-armed – was sent to conduct the raids at the break of dawn. From the outset, it was quite obvious that a significant part of their role was merely to intimidate and frighten. In one example, up to thirty police officers, many of whom looked like military commandos with their heavy armour, barged into the house of a local family, shouting orders and intimidating the occupants. The family inside this house consisted of six young children, aged between three and fourteen, and their frightened and confused mother; the father was overseas, and the police were aware of this fact. This then begs the question of why thirty police officers and so much armour was required to subdue a group of kids and a young lady? The sheer excessiveness of the raids was obvious to all who witnessed them, and this is but one example.

Carpets were torn out of the floor in the house of another family and ceilings damaged; cash – not belonging to the suspect – confiscated in yet another; a woman was denied the right to leave her house; children were forced to dress and undress in the presence of police; some women whose houses were raided were asked to become spies for ASIO; and general degrading treatment and language was experienced throughout. Importantly, most of the houses raided contained children, who, having been violently awoken at dawn by gun-wielding police – armed with semi automatic military style weapons – were obviously traumatised as a result. Many of the other family members also reported feelings of shock, anxiety and trauma, and are too scared to even seek professional help. One mother, whose house was raided, suffered a stroke and was taken to hospital for treatment. We pray that there are no long-term impacts upon their health – especially those of the children – who were aged as young as two.

Police occupied some family homes for over 48 hours. One of the raid victims who was merely a relative of an accused 'suspect' said the police worked in shifts. With each successive shift the new officers became increasingly ruder, sometimes concealing what they were doing, and damaging the property in the process, such as drilling large holes in walls and floors, pulling off carpet and digging up landscaped yards. Some of the families raided have recently migrated to Australia, and we are concerned that they may not have been aware of their rights, as they had no access to independent legal advice (as all phones were immediately seized). They may also not have been aware what exactly was seized from their homes, and have signed documents of receipts under intimidation without entirely understanding what they were signing. Many of the families are also weary of publicly revealing their stories due to fear of media misrepresentation.

Some pressing questions which need to be asked here, and considered by the public, are the following: according to Police assistant commissioner Steve Fontana, no immediate threat was identified, which also explains why no members of Al Furqan were actually charged with any offences. If no danger to the community was present, then why were raids of such a magnitude required, and how were they justified? Was it necessary to petrify young children with such intimidating tactics? Are the police satisfied that a woman suffered heart problems as a result of their over-the-top raids which were obviously not necessary? Why could the police have not simply requested a basic search warrant, which would have granted them all the access they required, rather than acting as if there were weapons of mass destruction hidden beneath the carpet of our homes? We have always been very open about our views, and are happy to discuss them with any member of the public, and this has also been acknowledged by the police. So why was such a violent and secretive raid necessary when we make no secret of our beliefs and they can easily be accessed by any member of the public?

Just as important and alarming is the fact that Attorney General Nicola Roxon has publicly said that "police have uncovered people with a serious intent to cause harm" ([Read it here](#)). These prejudicial comments imply that members of our community are guilty, before having been put through any judicial process. We are concerned that such comments would have a substantial impact on one's presumption of innocence if any cases were taken to court. Besides, how exactly has the Attorney General come to the definitive conclusion that there is intent to cause harm *before* evidence has been put through the proper judicial process and examined by a qualified judge?

These facts only further demonstrate that these raids were not about preventing terrorism or keeping the community safe. Instead, they were largely about intimidating the Muslim community, as well as justifying the very expensive existence of anti-terror authorities, whose jobs are threatened with the realisation that there are hardly any serious terrorism cases to investigate.

Crucial to keep in mind is the backdrop within which such actions have taken place. The Australian Human Rights Commission conducted research in 2003 which concluded that anti-Muslim sentiment was not only alive and well in Australia, but was actually growing. This research only confirmed what many in the Muslim community already know through experience: that Islamophobia is a real and growing problem in Australia. These latest raids, as well as those carried out previously, need to be seen within this context of the rise of Islamophobia. Muslims in Australia have experienced heightened marginalisation, vilification and discrimination as a result of these attitudes, and the anti-terror laws are simply an extension of this wide-reaching problem. We have little doubt that these raids are directly connected to the problem of Islamophobia, and this is evidenced by the fact that, had any other group been exclusively targeted by the police as the Muslim community has been, there would have been much outrage and backlash – and rightly so.

It's important to keep in mind when considering these raids that just last week we discovered and ousted a government spy amongst our community. The existence of such spies is abhorrent and serves to completely undermine the faith of the Muslim community in the justice processes of this system. The fact that we *accidentally* uncovered a spy highlights the quality of those being employed by ASIO and the Federal Police. This should not only make the public question the capacity of such authorities in spending tax-payer money, but also question whether they are actually intelligent enough to distinguish between real and imagined threats. Again, as we have nothing to hide, we did not feel the need to modify or conceal any of our views or resources, even after the discovery of a spy clearly indicated that we were being monitored. We are an Islamic information centre whose goal is to educate people about the teachings of Islam, and thus we are open about and do not feel the need to shy away from our beliefs. We are also concerned about the very real possibility that such authorities are engaged in processes of entrapment towards the Muslim community, whereby key evidence is *planted* rather than *discovered*. This has been known to occur commonly in America, and should be considered as a very real possibility here in Australia also.

As is common with such incidents, the media has seen fit to sensationalise and dramatise all aspects of this case, rather than providing balanced reporting. We ask that the privacy of our community be respected, and note that it is disturbing to see that family homes have been pictured in certain media outlets; this is an entirely irresponsible act.

We wish also to clarify certain issues which have been circulating in the media:

- 1- No firearms, ammunition, explosives, or weapons of any sort were discovered in the Al Furqan centre
- 2- The firearms located in a community member's home were legitimately registered and entirely legal
- 3- Al Furqan does not run 'terrorist training camps'. The photos used by the media to make such claims are from annual camping trips or paintball skirmish outings. These events were organised by Al Furqan and other Muslim organisations, and the images shared on Facebook
- 4- 'Sheikh Harun' has never referred to himself as a sheikh, and neither has Al Furqan promoted him as such
- 5- Al Furqan Islamic Centre has never propagated violence against the Australian public or called on people to carry out terrorist attacks
- 6- As there was no evidence of any unregistered firearms, chemicals or bomb-making materials, we find it detestable and questionable that many media outlets have seen fit to link bomb-making procedures to discussions of Al –Furqan. This also has significant potential to prejudice any future trials, as well as further entrenching stereotypes of Muslims as violent terrorists

Some of these accusations are little more than fabrications, while others might be based on misunderstandings. In order to alleviate potential confusion, we would like to briefly clarify our position on a number of issues:

- We believe that God is One, without father, mother, son, or any partners
- We believe that Muhammad is the final messenger of God and His servant
- We also believe that Jesus was a beloved prophet of God, as well as Abraham, Noah, Adam, and many others
- We disagree with the popular modern idea that Islam does not entail a political, economic or legal realm – we disagree that Islam is secular
- We believe that forceful conversions are wrong, and neither do we seek – nor have we ever sought – to violently overthrow the Australian government and implement Sharia Law
- We make a point to highlight the role of democratic governments, such as Australia, in the oppression of marginalised groups worldwide, including the propping up and support of ruthless dictators, such as Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, whom even the United Nations acknowledges was fraudulently elected

- We strongly condemn the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as support for the apartheid state of Israel
- We strongly oppose the government's brutal approach towards asylum seekers and refugees, which sees children detained in conditions which are worse than prisons. We also note that many of those seeking asylum are doing so as a result of the military and foreign policy practices of Australia
- We regularly condemn the violence which capitalism produces globally, including its contribution towards massive inequality and poverty perpetuated through neo-liberal policies
- We oppose all forms of colonialism and imperialism, both its obvious and subtle manifestations. We condemn Australia's historical legacy of colonialism and exploitation of Indigenous peoples, as well as its continuing oppression towards them. We empathise with their historical and current plight, and recognise that they have also been subject to similar police and government tactics, though on a much larger and repressive scale.

This is what we stand for, and this is what we preach. If at times it is fiery, then that is due to the fact that we are passionate about justice, and see major injustices occurring around the world today – particularly against Muslims. We discuss our views in the belief that countries such as Australia protect the right to free speech, though it is becoming increasingly obvious today that such rights are not always afforded to Muslims. We welcome any member of the public who would like clarification about any related matter to contact our centre and make an appointment, either by phone, email or person, and we will happily discuss all genuine concerns. This invitation is also extended to those who are sending us abusive messages, as well as Muslim leaders who have publicly vilified us without having met us.

Finally, we wish to express solidarity with all the Muslims raided both past and present, as well as those imprisoned under unjust and draconian anti-terror laws. We pray for your wellbeing, and offer our support to you and your families. We would also like to thank the many people who have expressed their support for us in these trying times. We very much appreciate your concerns and assistance, and reassure you that, despite the best efforts of the government, media and intelligence groups, our community remains unified and in high spirits, and we will not let the shameful tactics of the authorities intimidate or silence us.